



Osibisaba

Music in Ghana, old & new.  
Traditional, afri-classical, afrobeat,  
gospel, highlife, hiplife, mylife ♪ ♪  
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Wednesday, September 29, 2010

### More Danceband: Telephone Lobi



On the heels of the previous post, here's the other Original Music compilation featuring Ghanaian "Dance band" music, *Telephone Lobi* (1995). This album offers some more variety, as a greater selection of bands have been chosen by the OM folks. This broader representation of the Ghanaian "dance band" scene in turn reflects a greater diversity of individual styles and sounds. Be sure to check out these great tunes, including some of my favorites like the Ramblers' "Agbo Ayee" and "Me Ye Fun" by the Police Band #1.

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Ka

Palmwine Music: Ayonko Asiwa Group -  
Koobi Awaree

► August (4)



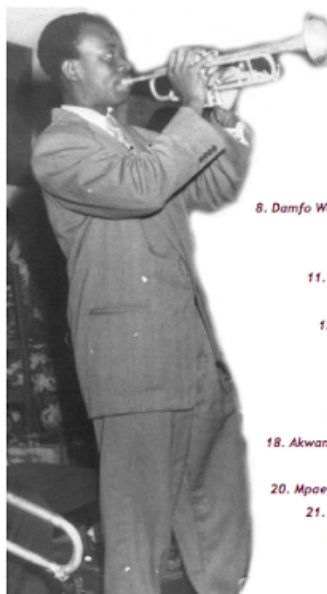
Koo Nimo

## "Osibisaba"

*"The Cape Coast guitarist Kwaa Mensah told me that his uncle Jacob Sam (Kwame Asare), the first to record local Ghanaian music, was taught guitar by a Liberian Kru. Both "Sam" and his nephew were Fantis, a coastal Ghanaian people who had many fishing communities on offshore islands stretching from Liberia in the west to the Cameroon in the east.*

*The Fanti fishermen had a traditional recreational music known as "Osibi" and this gave an early name "O s i b i s a b a" for the maritime influenced guitar and accordion music that was developing in the Fanti port towns around 1900. Later on from the 1920's the word "Osibisaba" gradually became replaced by the generic Ghanaian term for its popular music, "Highlife."*

- J. Collins



1. Masan Makwo - Stargazers Band
2. Vicky Nyem Afum - Zeal Onyiah
3. Oya Kae Me - Red Spots
4. Meda Ho Mawo - Black Beats
5. Hunua - Broadway Dance band
6. Akwankwa Hieni - Moderniers
7. Anokwa Edomi - Black Beats
8. Damfo Wa Eni Ewo - E.T. Mensah & His Tempos Orchestra
9. Mbra Nimfo Quist - Builders Brigade
10. Aol Adofo - Spike Anyankor's Rhythm Aces
11. Fabra Mento Bi - Spike Anyankor's Rhythm Aces
12. Konkonsa - Spike Anyankor's Rhythm Aces
13. Mac's Special - Spike Anyankor's Rhythm Aces
14. Amma Mere Wo - Black Beats
15. Telephone Lobi - Black Beats
16. Baby Julie Yaba - Black Beats
17. Odo Pa - E.T. Mensah & His Tempo Orchestra
18. Akwantu - Professional Beach Melodians "Uhuru No. 2"
19. Me Ye Fun - Police Band #1
20. Mpaeba Na Ehia - Ramblers International Dance Band
21. Agbo Ayee - Ramblers International Dance Band
22. Msaman Mfomu Sudro - High Class Diamonds
23. Kae Me (Merengue) - High Class Diamonds

Mbra Nimfo Quist - Builders Brigade

Posted by O s i b i s a b a at 10:41 PM 3 comments

Labels: Dance band, E.T. Mensah, Highlife, King Bruce, Original Music

Tuesday, September 28, 2010

## Giants of Danceband Highlife, 1950s-1970s






Nana Kwame Ampadu

*Hard-to-find / out-of-print albums are posted here out of love & appreciation. If you have a problem or objection to specific content (i.e. audio files, pictures, quoted text, etc.) just send me an email or leave a comment and I'll remove it.*



## Blogs

 afrobeat, afrofunk, afrojazz, afrorock ...  
From Israel: Hoodna Afrobeat Orchestra



*Giants of Danceband Highlife* (1990) is another great, hard-to-find Original Music compilation. This one features tracks by three of the most famous and prolific Ghanaian dance bands, E.T. Mensah's *Tempos*, the *Ramblers*, and *Uhuru*.

Download it [Here](#).




















"The big dance bands flourished during the 1950s and 1960s in both Ghana and Nigeria. In Ghana, the leading bands played regularly in the major towns, now growing rapidly in population ... The large towns like Accra, Cape Coast, and Kumasi had prestigious ballroom orchestras which played waltzes, foxtrots, quicksteps, ragtimes, rumbas, and highlifes to a black elite audience in top hats and evening dress. The earliest of these was the *Excelsior Orchestra* formed in 1914. It was in this context of local melodies like the *Osibisaba* and *Ashiko*, being orchestrated for an upper class audience, that the term "highlife" was coined (Collins, *Musismakers of W. Africa*).

Comprising a typical line-up of brass, vocals, percussion, drums, double bass and electric guitar, the bands could play a bewildering variety of styles reflecting popular demand although highlife itself remained the staple affair. The lyrics were also delivered in a variety of languages including Twi, Fante, Ga, Efik, Ibo, Ewe, and Hausa (as well as English and Spanish).

During the 1960s, many dance bands suffered at the hands of the state bands who, by offering a regular salary and stable employment, attracted many of the best musicians away from the private highlife bands. Many of the large state corporations, from the Cocoa Board and the Black Star line to the state hotels and the Builders Brigade, formed their own outfits. By the 1970s, hard on the heels of economic decline and an increase in the demand for imported music, highlife dance bands were steadily declining in number and popularity. The *Tempos* and the *Uhurus* staggered on but it was really only the *Ramblers* who survived as a viable musical unit (R. Graham, *The Da Capo Guide*)."

*Note:* Graham's description of Dance band stagnation seems somewhat inaccurate to me, as he fails to mention contrary trends such as the continuous popularity of King Bruce's dance bands, Uhuru's later successes (e.g. excursions into Afrobeat and fusion music with Oscar Sulley), and E.T. Mensah's '70s *revival*.

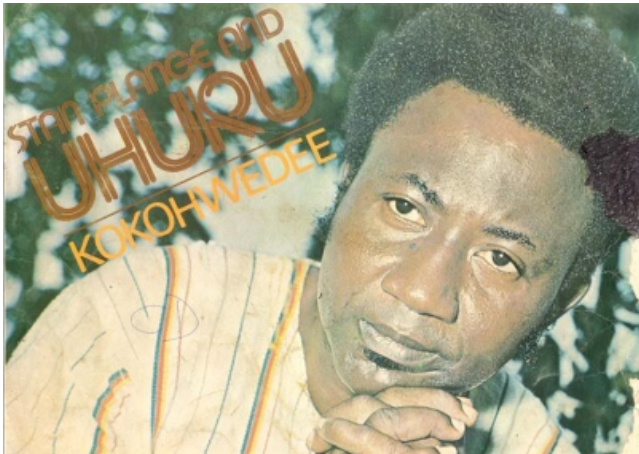
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E.T. Mensah



Ramblers Dance Band







BIG BENJI MATEKE

3 months ago

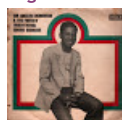
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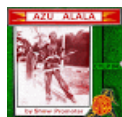
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### with comb & razor

LAGOS DISCO INFERNO IS BACK

AGAIN!!!

Stan Plange &amp; Uhuru



Jerry Hansen of Ramblers

Posted by O s i b i s a b a at 2:50 PM 1 comments

Labels: Dance band, E.T. Mensah, Highlife, Original Music

Thursday, September 23, 2010

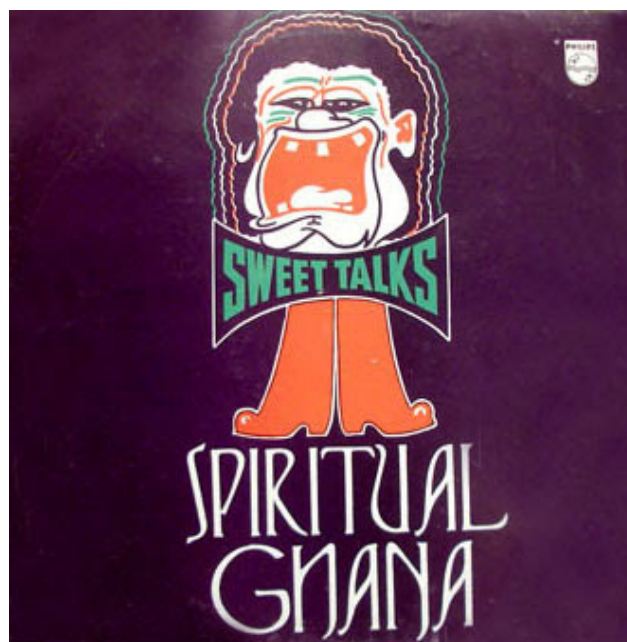
## Sweet Talks - Spiritual Ghana



2 years ago



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Sweet gospel music with "Spiritual Ghana (1976)" from the ever-popular Sweet Talks. The brainchild of singer A.B. Crentsil and leader/guitarist Smart Nkansah (who would later split to form the fantastic Sunsum Band), the Sweet Talks were always at the top of their game in the '70s.



On side one we have a medley of Ghanaian hymns and church songs, while side two is described as "Osode" music. This traditional Fanti genre was made famous by C.K. Mann, who brought a highlife twist to this "modern Osode."

### Folk Spiritual Medley:

Noah  
 Sor Abofo  
 Gyae Su Syae Nkomo  
 Nyame Ye Odo  
 Mighty Power  
 Onua Kyere Me W'Anigye  
 Mema M'Ani So  
 Naomi  
 Mete Se Don Bi Rebo  
 Jesus Sore  
 Da No

### Folk Spiritual Osode Medley:

Mara Metse Ho Yi Menye Adwuma  
 Enowa  
 Whana Nom A



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Get out your white handkerchiefs for this one!

[Download](#)

Posted by O s i b i s a b a at 2:44 AM 14 comments

Labels: [A.B. Crentsil](#), [Gospel](#), [Highlife](#), [Smart Nkansah](#)

Saturday, September 18, 2010

## Palmwine Videos: T.O. Jazz & Koo Nimo

If you've enjoyed the recent posts here about palmwine music then I'm sure you'll also appreciate these two fantastic videos, courtesy of youtube (if you haven't seen them already). The first features the late T.O. Jazz playing a heartbreakingly beautiful solo piece, it looks like near the music department at the University of Ghana, Legon. Is anyone familiar with this highlife song? I'd love to know the title and composer. T.O. Jazz is absolutely one of the great old-time highlife musicians in my book, so stay tuned for more music from him in the future.

For the second video we have Koo Nimo performing at a music festival in the Netherlands, again joined onstage by Osei Korankye (this time Osei is singing whilst alternating between premprensua and hand drums).

Enjoy watching these inspiring highlife legends!





Ebenezer Calender (Sierra Leone)

Posted by O s i b i s a b a at 11:36 PM 1 comments

Labels: Afrikafestival Hertme, Highlife, Koo Nimo, Osei Korankye, Palmwine Music, T.O. Jazz

Thursday, September 16, 2010

## I've Found My Love: 1960's Guitar Band Highlife of Ghana

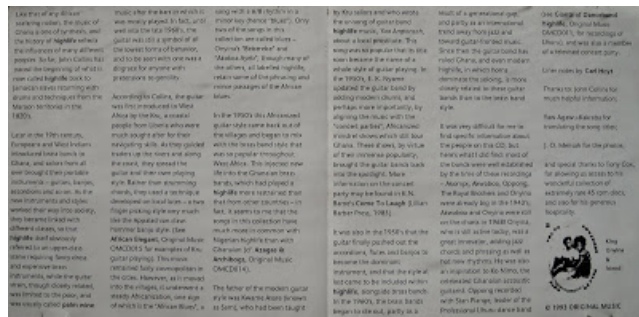


John Storm Roberts' **Original Music** label released some fantastic, groundbreaking compilations of old African music from across the continent during the 1990s, so it's a shame that these CDs are now out of print and so difficult to find. *I've Found My Love* is, to me, one of the particularly special Original Music releases. Each one of these electric, guitar-band highlife tunes is more excellent than the last! Old-time greats like **King Onyina** and **S.K. Oppong** appear, along with other familiar names like Akompi, Akwaboa, and the Royal Brothers. If you enjoy this music check out **Akom Ko** (another similar compilation) over at Likembe, this one also featuring a few dance-band style tunes.

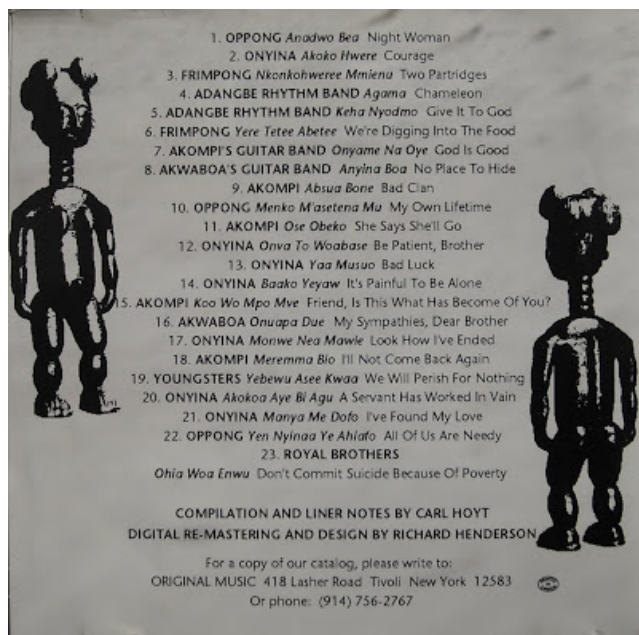
Download *I've Found My Love* [Here](#)



The liner notes included with *I've Found My Love* don't seem particularly well written in my opinion in terms of content and scope, but they're worth checking out for some general historical background on highlife if you'd like:



Also, I feel compelled to give brief mention of track eleven, Akompi's "Ose Obeko." This tune begins with a unique solo bass introduction that really strikes me each time I listen to it. Here, the bass (possibly an upright?) mimics the playing style of the Ashanti *Atumpan* drums (often referred to as "talking drums"). Played in pairs of two differently pitched drums, the *Atumpan* is used to express verbal phrases, proverbs, and appellations. The experienced player is able to translate these speech patterns (many of which are set phrases) onto the *Atumpan* based upon the different tones of the *Twɔ* language (it should be noted that the Ga and Ewe do use the *Atumpan* as well in relation to their own languages). I think this example of *Atumpan* drumming translated onto a bass is rather remarkable, so I've included the track here for your listening:

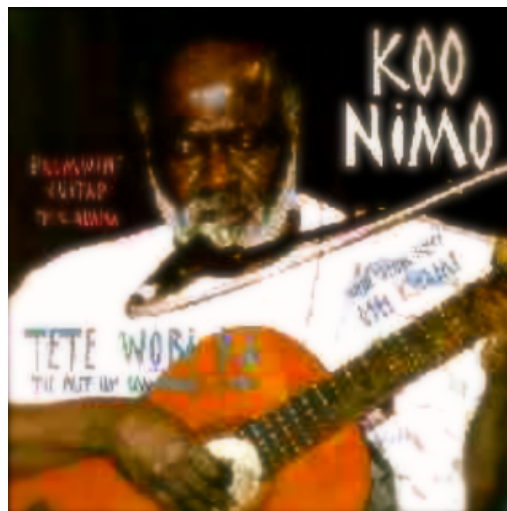


Posted by O s i b i s a b a at 3:22 PM 6 comments

Labels: *Atumpan*, *Guitar Band*, *Highlife*, *King Onyina*, *Original Music*

Sunday, September 12, 2010

## Koo Nimo & Osei Korankye - Tete Wobi Ka



Here's another album of palmwine music by one of my favorite musicians, Koo Nimo. The record is *Tete Wobi Ka* (2000), and here Agya Koo is joined by Osei Korankye, another truly one-of-a-kind musician. Osei plays the Akan harp *seprewa*, the original instrument of Ghanaian palm-wine music (pictured last below). This is a particularly important instrument, as it is the style and playing technique of *seprewa*, translated onto the guitar, that has remained at the core of Ghanaian highlife from the 1920s through the 21st century. Osei is also a singer, and his tenor provides backing to Koo Nimo's deeper, resonant voice through much of this album (I'll be devoting another post to Osei in the coming weeks).

*Tete Wobi Ka* doesn't appear to be commercially available any longer, so I've offered it [here for download](#). Koo Nimo's excellent first album *Osabarima* is (I believe) still available commercially for purchase.



Below is a bit of biography on Koo Nimo himself:

"World-renowned Palm Wine musician, guitarist Daniel Amponsah, best known by his stage name Koo Nimo is often referred to as the "National Treasure" of Ghana. Thought of as a "living legend" by many Ghanaians, Koo Nimo's music has been a very relevant source of musical inspiration and continues to be after 40 years of



performance.

Apart from his early exposure to music by his parents and playing in local groups, particularly I.E.'s Band, Koo Nimo also studied classical guitar style, harmony, counterpoint etc. at various times, to enhance his musical appreciation. "I didn't want to be a Segovia. I wanted to be an African guitarist, using my technique to do justice to my own music which I understand better," explains Agya Koo, as he is generally known in Ghana.

Although a great consumer of jazz music- from Charlie Parker, Duke Ellington, John Coltrane, Wes Montgomery, Count Basie through Antonio Carlos Jobim and Lorendo Almeida to Thelonius Monk- Agya Koo drew inspiration first from Ghanaian guitarist Kwabena Onyina. But as he explains, "I didn't, however, want to be a second-rate guitarist, hence my determination to dig into my past for a traditional sound which I have now fashioned." He has represented his country with his Adadam Agofama Group at several international arts festivals and has also toured extensively throughout Europe and America, where he shared the stage with Puerto Rico's Yomo Toro during a 1988 "Guitar Summit".

Notwithstanding his stature and popularity, both within and outside Ghana, Agya Koo remains a man of the people committed to re-exposing his countrymen, particularly the young, to their own folk music. His priceless music represents a living art form - not a museum showpiece."

- <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/latham/koonimo/afrofest.htm>



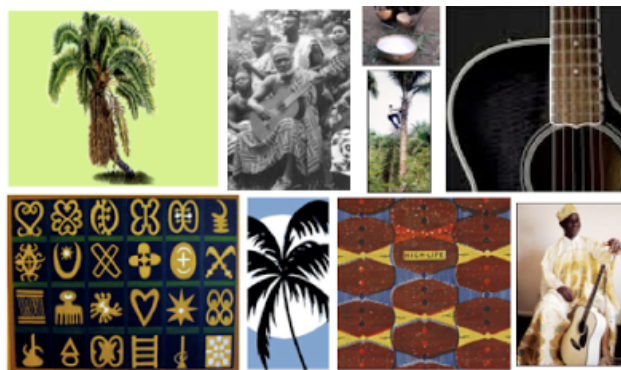
Osei & Agya Koo

Posted by O s i b i s a b a at 12:05 AM 8 comments

Labels: Akan, Highlife, Koo Nimo, Osei Korankye, Palmwine Music, Seprewa

Thursday, September 9, 2010

## Palmwine Music: Ayonko Asiwa Group - Koobi Awareee



Here's an album of beautiful "palmwine" music by the Ayonko Asiwa Group. The record features two twenty-minute-long tracks in medley style, simple and perfect with just a few singers, guitar, and light percussion.

You can download it [here](#) .



If you're interested, here's a brief bit of historical background on Ghanaian palmwine music from scholar John Collins:

*In Ghana it was the Kru-taught musician Kwame Asare (Jacob Sam) whose Kumasi Trio made the first recordings of "palm wine music" in 1928 when they went to London to record for Zonophone. This session also included the first recording of the famous song "Yaa Amponsah" which provided one of the most enduring and important melodic-rhythmic riffs found in Ghanaian highlife.*

*When the costal Fante-style music moved inland into Asante and Kwahu during the 1930s it blended with the music of the local seprewa harp-lute. The result was a more Africanised or rather Akan variety of palm wine guitar music known as "Akan Blues" or "Odonson." It was sung in a recitative way rather than in structured verses using African modal progressions (between two tone centres a full tone apart) rather than the western harmonic progressions (I, IV, V chords) of the earlier costal style. These small palm wine guitar bands consisted of just one or two guitars accompanied by "clips" (i.e. claves), "Adakam" (wooden box as drum), and Gome (giant bass frame drum) or "Premprensua" (hand-piano).*



Premprensua

Koo Nimo, one of the truly great living palmwine musicians, gives his own perspective on the origins of this genre:



*"Palmwine is a local drink. In villages you find, under a shady tree, in the afternoons old men would relax and be telling stories about life. Marriage experiences, disappointments. Now, at that time seprewa was the instrument, the African harp-lute. And the seprewa player might be sitting around, then a palmwine tapper would bring a pot of palmwine, usually identified by the foam on top. Then the calabash is passed round and they drink of palmwine. Now the music that is played under that environment was called palmwine guitar music. In this way, acoustic and folklore Highlife music inherited its name from the fact that it gained its popularity at Palm Wine bars, which symbolically represented music of the masses."*

If you're further interested in this music be sure to check out the ["Vintage Palmwine"](#) album (recorded and released by John Collins) featuring classic palmwine musicians T.O. Jazz, Kwaa Mensah, and Koo Nimo.

Also, [this album](#) by Kwabena Nyama will simply blow you away!





Posted by O s i b i s a b a at 12:04 AM 1 comments

Labels: Akan, Highlife, Koo Nimo, Palmwine Music

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